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THOUGHTS
ON
NATIONAL
INSANITY.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

THOUGHTS
ON
THE
NATIONAL
DEBT

PRICE ONE SHILLING

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THOUGHTS

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ON

NATIONAL
INSANITY.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;
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THOUGHTS

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LONDON

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1800

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THOUGHTS

ON

NATIONAL INSANITY.

AS it is well known, that there are many individuals of the human species, who are occasionally deprived of the use of their reasoning powers, and sometimes totally; and who, when in that situation, are wholly incapable of taking proper care of themselves, or of adopting that mode of conduct which would be most conducive to their real interest; so it is also true, that, at certain periods, whole nations, or at least the greater part of them, have been under the influence of a

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kind of temporary delirium. When the majority of a nation discover a total ignorance of their own real advantage, when they manifest an extreme incapacity of reasoning concerning it with any justness or accuracy, when they plunge headlong into measures highly pernicious or destructive, and when they listen to no rational remonstrances upon the subject, they are then in a state so exactly similar to that of individual lunatics, that such a people may properly be said to be in a state of national lunacy.

THE English have undoubtedly distinguished themselves, at particular periods, above most of the modern nations of Europe, by their courage, industry, activity, talents, and love of liberty. But as it has been said, that there is a certain degree of wit and genius, which is sometimes strongly tinged with insanity; so it may be remarked, that the people of England, however distinguished as a nation, have, at certain times, exhibited

marks of lunacy, scarcely to be equalled by any other nation.

ONE early instance of national insanity, which took place in England, was that relative to the contest between the two houses of York and Lancaster. It was not of the least real consequence to the people of England, whether the throne was filled by a prince of the house of York, or of the house of Lancaster, independently of the personal characters of the princes themselves, which was a matter not even taken into consideration. Whether a prince of the house of York, or of the house of Lancaster, should succeed to the throne of England, was in reality, at that period, a matter of no more consequence, than it would be at present, whether one man should be elected sheriff of London, who lived in the ward of Langbourn, or another who lived in the ward of Bassishaw, when their talents and qualifications in other respects were exactly similar. And yet, in this unim-

portant contest, between the houses of York and Lancaster, the lives of many thousand Englishmen were sacrificed; and the contest continued many years. When any people act in this manner, when they suffer themselves to be involved in great dangers, and in great calamities, for matters of no importance, they may justly be regarded as in a state of national lunacy.

IN the reign of Mary, one of the daughters of Henry the Eighth, a great spirit of religious lunacy broke out among the priests of the then established church, and many of the laymen, which occasioned some hundreds of worthy and pious men to end their days in the flames, because they happened not to have adopted the senseless theological opinions of some of the mad zealots of the time. At such periods, if any considerable number of men are found to be really in possession of their understandings, they are considered as just objects of persecution. Somewhat of the same

same religious lunacy has been exhibited both at earlier and at later periods in this kingdom; and has also sometimes produced very sanguinary scenes in foreign countries.

AFTER the civil war in the reign of Charles the First, a war which was undertaken on the part of the people for the most justifiable reasons, and after the termination of the republic, and the protectorate of Cromwell, the people of England were seized with a spirit of general insanity, which brought about the Restoration, which was conducted in a manner fit only for a nation of lunatics. Charles the First had trampled upon the most important privileges of the people, had seized the property of his subjects, and imprisoned many of their persons, without any legal authority, and governed for more than eleven years without any parliament. For his accumulated acts of tyranny, he was at length deservedly brought to the block; and yet the people of England were afterwards mad enough,

enough, though they had been involved, by the conduct of the late tyrant, in all the calamities of civil war, to restore to the throne his son, who had been a fugitive in foreign countries, and who was a man of very licentious principles and manners, without any new security for their liberties, or adopting any proper regulations to secure themselves from future tyranny. The case of Charles the Second also afforded a full demonstration, that kings are not always esteemed in proportion to their merits. Charles was eminently profligate, both in his private and in his public capacity, as a man, and as a king; and yet Mr. Hume asserts, that “no prince was ever more blest with the cordial affection and attachment of his subjects.”

SOME instances of national insanity were exhibited in the reign of queen Anne; and instances of national lunacy also took place during the reign of king George the Second. At one period of it the people of England were

were filled with much senseless zeal in support of the queen of Hungary; and they afterwards discovered similar insanity in favour of the king of Prussia. In 1758, a subsidiary treaty was entered into between Great Britain and Frederick, the third king of Prussia, by which the former was to pay to that prince six hundred and seventy thousand pounds sterling, for which no specific services were stipulated to be rendered to Great Britain. This enormous subsidy was, however, continued for several years, though not the least benefit was derived from it to this country. Frederick himself, indeed, ridiculed the English for the guineas they squandered in Germany: but he was notwithstanding very popular in England, and he was celebrated, and prayed for, in public chapels, as the great defender of the Protestant faith; though by no Popish prince in the world were so many Protestants injured and oppressed, especially in Saxony; and though it is certain, that he was a disbeliever of the Christian religion, and that he

even

even rejected the doctrine of a future state. His victories were of no more importance to the people of England than victories gained in the moon would have been: but count Algarotti says, “the English began to talk
 “of nothing but the king of Prussia’s victories.”—“His portrait was every where to
 “be seen, and was the admiration of all
 “descriptions of persons. His birth-day was
 “kept, throughout the whole island, with
 “as much rejoicing, as if, at the battle of
 “Rossbach, he had saved England from the
 “invasion of the French.” If the people of England at this period had been in their senses, instead of expressing this joy for the king of Prussia’s victories, they would have manifested their indignation at their own ministry, for having so uselessly squandered away such enormous sums of their money in Germany.

BUT, at no period, have the people of England been seized with such strong, dangerous,

gerous, and pernicious fits of lunacy, as during the present reign. Dr. Johnson, after some years of this reign had elapsed, said, in one of his Political Tracts, "To any man, who extends his thoughts to national considerations, the times are dismal and gloomy." A great part of this gloominess, which subsists now at least as much as it did then, may certainly be attributed to the wisdom of administration. If we reflect on the state of things, at the accession of his present majesty, we must be convinced, that it could not be expected that any ministers, of ordinary talents, could have been successful in producing such dismal scenes, and such gloomy apprehensions. But great things may be effected by sagacity, by industry, and by perseverance.

AMONG the instances of national insanity, which have been exhibited during the present reign, the zeal, which great numbers of the people manifested, in support of the American

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war, deserves to be particularly mentioned. The war originated in claims, equally unjust and impolitic, made on the part of the British ministry; and the contest at length terminated in the loss, to Great Britain, of the greatest part of her American colonies, of many thousand valuable lives, and in the expenditure of more than one hundred millions of money.

In the year 1780, a great spirit of religious lunacy broke out in the city of London, and in the neighbourhood, and communicated itself, though in an inferior degree, to some other parts of the kingdom. Many persons assembled together, who pretended extreme zeal for the Protestant religion, though they acted in a manner totally inconsistent with its principles; and, being influenced by a mad zeal against the Papists, they burned or pulled down several Romish chapels, and many private houses, and other buildings. These violences were carried to an enormous height, before

before they were stopped by any proper interference of the magistrates, or of the ministry.

IN the course of the years 1789 and 1790, a great revolution took place in France. The inhabitants of that country, who had been subjected for some centuries to a despotic government, emancipated themselves from their antient tyranny, and established a form of government, by which the rights of the people appeared to be secured. Many of the inhabitants of England, from motives of genuine philanthropy, rejoiced at this event; they rejoiced, that a great nation had shaken off its fetters, and asserted the rights of human nature; and they publickly testified their joy at this event. But the mean, the selfish, and the fordid, men incapable of any noble or generous sentiments, and who cared for none of the human race, except themselves, were displeased at such expressions of enlarged benevolence, and testified their dissatisfaction at any declarations in favour of the French revolution.

lution. And some persons in office, as well as others, appeared to be mad enough to wish even for a war with France, because the inhabitants of that country had determined to assert their liberties. Other reasons were pretended, but none that would bear examination or inquiry.

On the 14th of July, 1791, public meetings were held in London, Norwich, Liverpool, Birmingham, and in various other parts of the kingdom, to celebrate the French revolution. It was considered as an event highly worthy of commemoration by the friends of general freedom, and of human happiness. But many were highly displeased at these meetings; and a spirit of lunacy, both religious and political, was very strikingly exhibited at this time at Birmingham. Dr. Priestley, so justly celebrated for his productions in science and in literature, was then minister of a congregation of Protestant Dissenters in that town. He had written, in opposition

position to Mr. Burke, in defence of the French revolution; but, probably from prudential reasons, he had not been present at the commemoration of that event in Birmingham. Notwithstanding which, a mob, which had been assembled for the purpose of insulting the gentlemen who were employed in commemorating the French revolution, afterwards burned down Dr. Priestley's meeting-house, and also destroyed another meeting-house in that town. They afterwards totally demolished Dr. Priestley's dwelling-house, which was at some distance from the town, and destroyed the whole of his library, and his valuable philosophical apparatus, together with all his manuscripts. They also burned down the house of another dissenting minister, and destroyed the houses of several other respectable dissenters. These splendid transactions occasioned so much joy at Birmingham, that the town was illuminated; and it appeared, that some clergymen in the neighbourhood, of much bigotry, and little literature, and even

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some magistrates, had been promoters of these riots. It was said, indeed, that the inhabitants of Birmingham were offended with Dr. Priestley, for having written against the church of England: but some persons were of opinion, that not many of the mob were much conversant in the writings of Dr. Priestley; and that, as the church of England was so well endowed, and furnished with such a capital collection of bishops, deans, archdeacons, and prebendaries, besides inferior clergymen, the doctrines of the church might have been defended in a better manner than by the bludgeons of rioters and ruffians. However, as these riots had been conducted and carried on by Church and King men, it was determined, that there should be no parliamentary investigation of the business, though a motion had been made for that purpose.

Soon after the establishment of a limited monarchy in France, a conspiracy was en-

tered into, by some of the despotic princes on the continent, to overturn this new constitution, and to re-establish the old government. That these princes should adopt such a line of conduct was not wonderful; but that England, which had "deafened the world with her clamours for liberty," should join in such a confederacy, might be considered as a just subject of surprize. In May, 1792, M. Chauvelin was received at the court of England as ambassador from the king of the French, and that prince was then supposed to be sincere in his professions to maintain the new constitution. In July, the same year, M. Chauvelin, in the name of the French king, presented a memorial, soliciting the mediation of Great Britain, against the great confederacy, which was forming in Europe, to interfere in the internal government of France; but this mediation was declined by the court of Great Britain.

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On the 21st of January, 1793, the French king, who had been accused of acting treacherously respecting the new constitution, and of endeavouring to re-establish a despotic government in France, was beheaded at Paris. Before this event, M. Chauvelin had presented his letters of credence from the executive council, as ambassador from the republic of France; but he was not received at court in that capacity; and, soon after the execution of the king, he was ordered to quit the kingdom in eight days. Great numbers of the English also expressed the most extreme indignation at the French, for having cut off the head of their king; and seemed to have totally forgotten, that a memorable example of royal decapitation had been given to the French by the English nation, in the case of king Charles the First.

A WAR now broke out between France and England; and a great alarm was excited in this

this kingdom, under the idea of the extreme danger of the propagation of French principles. Those principles of government, which had been laid down by Sydney and by Locke, and by various other English writers, and which the French appear to have borrowed from the English, were traduced as French principles. The greatest alarm was also spread of the danger, which might result from the circulation of mischievous opinions, and sentiments not conformable to the laws of the land; as if the laws of the land were intended to direct men in what manner they should think, and in what manner they should reason. The acts of violence, injustice, and cruelty, which were committed in France after the revolution, and which appear to have been chiefly occasioned by the improper interference of foreign despots, in the internal concerns of France, were magnified, and falsely represented, as the natural consequence of what were now termed French principles. A great outcry was also raised about French

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emissaries, who were said to be sent over into England, for the express purpose of propagating French principles; though not the least evidence was ever produced, that a single man had been sent over from France for that purpose. The secret committees of the last parliament likewise published, under the form of reports, the most gross and shameful misrepresentations of the views, designs, and conduct, of the societies established in England, for procuring a more equal representation of the people in parliament. As these societies wished for a reform of the British parliament, they had also expressed their wishes for the freedom and the happiness of other nations; but such sentiments as these, if publicly avowed, seemed to be considered as an high species of sedition.

THE war against France was soon found to be extremely injurious to trade, to manufactures, and to public and private credit; notwithstanding which there were many, who expressed

expressed their wishes for its continuance. And to induce the people to be the more ready to engage in the support of the war, they were told, that it was a war for the maintenance of social order and of religion. But to those, who were possessed of common sense, and who paid the least attention to the subject, it was manifest, that the foreign despots, who were engaged in the war, were not fighting, as was falsely and hypocritically pretended, for religion, for morality, and for the advantages of civil society; but they were contending, at an immense expence of blood and of treasure, for the pride and the power of royalty, and for such peculiar distinctions, privileges, and immunities, as are injurious to the common interests of mankind. Indeed, as to its being a war for the defence of religion, Mr. Erskine has justly observed, that “of
 “ all the pretences, by which the abused zeal
 “ of the people of England has been hurried
 “ on to a blind support of ministers, this

“ alarm for the Christian religion is the most
 “ impudent and preposterous.”

Mr. Burke, in his letter to the duke of
 Portland, brings it as an accusation against
 Mr. Fox, that “ he did his best to appeal to
 “ the judgments of the meanest and most
 “ ignorant of the people on the merits of the
 “ war.” He adds, “ the ground of a POLI-
 “ TICAL WAR is of all things that which the
 “ poor labourer and manufacturer are the
 “ least capable of conceiving. This sort of
 “ people know in general, that THEY MUST
 “ SUFFER BY WAR. It is a matter to which
 “ they are sufficiently competent, because it
 “ is a matter of FEELING.” It was not
 always considered in this country as a crime,
 to appeal to the understandings of the com-
 mon people; and it may reasonably be ques-
 tioned, whether any country can be in a
 situation that shall render it necessary to en-
 gage in a war, the reasons of which may not
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be made intelligible to a common weaver, or blacksmith, possessed only of an ordinary degree of understanding. The POLITICAL WARS, of which Mr. Burke speaks, appear to be wars that ought never to be commenced; and, if the poor MUST SUFFER BY WAR, men in power ought not to be so ready to engage in those schemes of ambition, which are productive of such calamity, and so destructive to the human race. not and ; in government the people to compare against their own liberties

If an attention be paid to various incidents and transactions about this period, the national insanity will appear still more conspicuous. At the close of the year 1792, before the commencement of the war between France and England, a society, or association, was established, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand, for the purpose, as they said, of "preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers." But when the designs of this society came to be explained, it appeared, that their object really

was,

was, to suppress the freedom of conversation, and the freedom of the press, under the pretence of suppressing seditious conversation, and seditious publications; and, in imitation of this London association, and by their recommendation, many others, of a similar nature, were established in various parts of the kingdom. In many countries, instances have occurred of the people conspiring against the government; but for a great part of the people to conspire against their own liberties, is a species of national frenzy of a very uncommon kind. This, however, was exhibited, in a very high degree, in England, at this period.

The Crown and Anchor association, and the country associations and societies which copied it, and adopted its principles, employed every method in their power to deprive the people at large of the freedom of speech, and the freedom of the press. The first of these associations avowedly received anonymous information

formation against private individuals, and endeavoured to justify themselves in acting upon such information, when they judged it expedient. These associations also endeavoured to invest publicans, throughout the kingdom, with a power of dictating to their customers what publications they should read in their houses, and on what subjects they should converse. They were supposed to be judges of what was, and what was not, seditious conversation; they were presumed to be equally skilful in political publications; and even female publicans were held to be fully competent to this business. It was one great object of these associations to prevent freedom of speech from being enjoyed in inns, in taverns, in coffee-houses, in ale-houses, in public-houses of any kind; and so unsafe was it supposed to be in England, once considered as a free country, to speak of kings or ministers of state, or to converse on any political subjects, that it was a regular part of the
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advertisement of the Westminster Forum, the name given to a public debating society, or to the place in which it was held, that "no political remarks, appertaining to this country, would be permitted."

THE Crown and Anchor association was most admirably adapted to increase the national lunacy; and accordingly this society did increase it by every means in their power; and particularly by circulating, throughout the kingdom, a great variety of wild, mad, and senseless publications. David Hume says, "The Collection of all Cromwell's speeches, letters, and sermons, (for he also wrote sermons) would make a great curiosity; and, with a few exceptions, might justly pass for one of the most nonsensical books in the world." I have now before me a volume of the Crown and Anchor association publications; I also consider this collection as a great curiosity; and, if inspected by critical readers,

readers, it would, perhaps, not be thought inferior, in point of nonsense, to any collection of the speeches of Cromwell.

It is observed by a medical writer, who is physician to the Manchester Lunatic Hospital and Asylum, that "False perception, and its consequent confusion of ideas, are constantly evident in cases of mania." And accordingly it was one of the symptoms of insanity, which was manifested in various parts of the kingdom, that it appeared to be supposed by great numbers, that if a nation were merely in possession of a king, that circumstance alone was sufficient to establish their liberties; forgetting, that under the old government of France, as well as in Spain and in Portugal, all those countries enjoyed the felicity of a king, without enjoying the felicity of freedom. And at this period, many persons pretended to be zealous friends of that form of government, which was established at the Revolution, whose conduct was manifestly calculated to

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deprive the people of the most important of those privileges, which the Revolution was intended to secure. Large numbers of men were formed into bodies, learned the military exercise, and stiled themselves volunteers; and it appeared, that these men were trained, not to defend their own liberties, or those of their posterity, but the power of the crown, and the measures of the minister; and all this these men stiled defending the constitution. Many of those, who lived on the plunder of the public, who had enormous salaries and pensions, for which no real services were rendered to the country, now employed themselves in traducing the characters, and misrepresenting the designs and the views, of the most virtuous and enlightened members of the community. Every effort was also employed to propagate the most slavish principles. The great object of some loyal writers, and loyal preachers, appeared to be, to perpetuate ignorance. And one grave divine, in a sermon preached before the university of Cambridge,

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on the anniversary of his present majesty's accession, maintained, that, "from the very beginning, God meant to hide knowledge from his creature man." Very fearful apprehensions were, indeed, entertained, of the people returning to their senses, and certainly not without reason: for, if such an event had taken place, some persons in power would not have found their situations very tenable. There was the greater reason for some fears of the inhabitants of the country being restored to a more sound state of mind, because, notwithstanding the general insanity, symptoms of common sense occasionally appeared among the lower orders of the people. Thus when it was announced, in the public papers, in a time of great scarcity of provisions, that "a creation of new peers was speedily to be expected," it was remarked by some mechanics, probably members of the London Corresponding Society, that if his majesty had been invested with a power of creating geese, or pigs, or calves, or cows, or oxen, it might,

at that juncture, have been much more beneficial to the community at large.

At the time when every method was employed, to prevent the people from meeting in societies, or in public assemblies, where any thing political could be expected to occur, BARRACKS were erected, at an immense expence, in various parts of the kingdom; and, besides the manifest accession of power to the crown, which was occasioned by the erection of these barracks, one avowed pretext for them was, to prevent the soldiers from associating with their countrymen. Conversation, reading, or thinking, either among citizens or soldiers, appeared to be particularly obnoxious to men in power; but the ministers, and ministerial writers, made discoveries superior to any of Sir Isaac Newton. Among other important discoveries, they found out, and maintained, that the general scarcity of specie in the kingdom, and the great distress of commercial people, which then prevailed,

were

were the result of the general prosperity and wealth of the kingdom.

IN 1795, an act of parliament was passed, for new-modelling the militia of the city of London, by which they were placed more under the power of the crown, and brought to a nearer resemblance to the regular troops. We do not find, that any representative of the city of London, or any magistrate of the city in parliament, made any material opposition to a bill, so little honourable to the city, and so unfavourable to the antient rights and privileges of the citizens. The corporation of London appear, indeed, at this time, to have possessed their full share of the general insanity. They repeatedly went up to the throne with flattering and servile addresses, totally unworthy of freemen; and the citizens sometimes chose for their magistrates, and even representatives in parliament, contractors, and such men, as hardly any creature, possessed even of common sense, could suppose likely

likely to render, as senators or as magistrates, any services to the community.

On the 23th of January, 1795, the lord mayor, aldermen, and common-council of the city of London, presented an address to the king, in which, after declarations of great loyalty, they expressed “ the deepest concern, “ that notwithstanding the uniform bravery “ manifested throughout his majesty’s fleets “ and armies, the objects of the just and “ NECESSARY WAR, in which this country was “ engaged, had not yet been accomplished.” But they declared, at the same time, that “ with the steadiest confidence in the God “ of all victory, they relied for the final success of his majesty’s arms ;” and they afterwards added, that they had the fullest conviction, that “ on this event alone, (and its “ consequences) depended THE EXISTENCE “ OF ALL GOOD GOVERNMENT, SECURITY, “ LAW, AND RELIGION.” The livery of London, however, who appeared to be much more

more in their senses than the aldermen, or the common-council, about the same time presented a petition to the house of commons, in which they “ deplored the evil consequences
 “ of war in general, but more particularly
 “ the disastrous effects of the present war, on
 “ the trade, manufactures, and commerce of
 “ the British empire ;” and they solicited the house, that “ disclaiming all right of interfering in the internal concerns of France,
 “ they would be pleased to take such measures as they, in their wisdom, should think
 “ proper, for the purpose of promoting a
 “ speedy peace between Great Britain and the
 “ power with whom it was at war.” But on the 8th of February, 1797, the lord-mayor, aldermen, and common-council of the city of London, presented another address to the king, in which they declared, that the continuance of the war could only be imputed to the inordinate ambition and tyrannical views of the French, who “ presumptuously aimed
 “ at the general overthrow of the liberties of
 “ Europe ;

“ Europe ; but more particularly MEDITATED
 “ THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS COUNTRY,
 “ AND THE SUBVERSION OF ITS CONSTI-
 “ TUTION.”

It has been remarked, by a medical author, that “ the diet, in maniacal cases, ought to be “ perfectly light and thin ; and such as is “ neither stimulating nor nourishing.” It might, therefore, have been presumed, that the Scotch, from the lowness of their living, would have been less under the influence of insanity, than the people of England ; but whether, from accident, some quantity of beef or mutton had gotten into the country ; or whether, from the exertions of sir John Sinclair, and the agricultural societies, their oatmeal had acquired a richer and more nutritive quality ; from whatever cause it proceeded, the inhabitants of Scotland seemed to be almost as much affected by lunacy as the people of England. It was considered, in Scotland, as a very high crime and misdemeanour,

meanour, for any man to read, or sell, or lend, or borrow, the works of Thomas Paine. It was, however, doubted by some speculative men, whether the mode of punishment adopted, for some of these offences, was perfectly political. The mode of punishment, which appeared to be preferred, was that of transportation. But it was thought, that transportation, from such a country as Scotland, if the removal were to any civilized country, ought to be regarded as a luxury, and not as a punishment. One striking instance of infamy was given in Scotland, in the election of the sixteen peers for that kingdom. The Earl of Lauderdale had distinguished himself above all his countrymen in the house of peers, by his public spirit, his activity in discharging his duty as a senator, and his zeal for promoting the real interests of liberty. But as his merits were superior to any other of the Scottish peers, he was particularly excluded in the new election. His integrity, his want of complaisance to the minister, and

his attachment to the great rights of mankind, seemed to be considered as totally inadmissible in a representative of the Scottish peerage.

It appeared to be thought reasonable, by some persons in power, at the close of the year 1795, that the people of England should suffer a considerable diminution of their liberties, as a compensation for the heavy taxes, and accumulated burthens, which had been heaped upon them during the course of the present war, and as a reward for the alacrity which they had discovered in the maintenance of it. The two bills, which were brought into parliament at this time, and which were denominated Mr. Pitt's and lord Grenville's bills, and which were passed, and became laws, can never be forgotten in the history of this country. One of these acts was entitled, "An act for the safety and preservation of his majesty's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices and attempts." In this act, those were declared

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to be traitors, and subject to the penalties of high treason, who should adopt any measures,
 “ in order, by force or constraint, to compel
 “ his majesty, or his heirs and successors, to
 “ change his or their measures or counsels, or
 “ in order to put any force or constraint
 “ upon, or to intimidate, or over-awe, both
 “ houses, or either house of parliament.”

Rigorous clauses were also added, relative to those who should “ by writing, printing,
 “ preaching, or other speaking, express, pub-
 “ lish, utter, or declare, any words, or sen-
 “ tences, to incite or stir up the people to
 “ hatred or contempt of the person of his
 “ majesty, his heirs or successors, or the go-
 “ vernment and constitution of this realm, as
 “ by law established.” The other act was
 entitled, “ An act for the more effectually
 “ preventing seditious meetings and assem-
 “ blies.” By this bill it was enacted, that if
 any persons, exceeding the number of fifty,
 should assemble for the purpose of considering
 of, or preparing, any petition, remonstrance,

or address to the king, or either house of parliament, for any alteration of matters established in church or state, or for deliberating on any grievance in church and state, (except county meetings, or meetings under very particular regulations, stipulated in the act) they should be deemed unlawful assemblies; and if twelve, or more persons, should assemble contrary to this act, and should continue together one hour after being required by a justice of peace, or other magistrate, by proclamation, to disperse, they should “be adjudged
 “felons, and should suffer death, as in case
 “of felony, without benefit of clergy.” And if any meetings should be holden in the manner prescribed by this new act, and any matter should be proposed or deliberated upon in such meeting, purporting that any thing by law established, “might be altered otherwise
 “than by the authority of the king, lords,
 “and commons, in parliament assembled,
 “or which should TEND to incite or stir up
 “the people to hatred or contempt of the
 “person of his majesty, his heirs, or suc-
 cessors,

“ cessors, or of the government and consti-
 “ tution of this realm, as by law established,”
 any justice of the peace might, by proclama-
 tion, command the persons assembled to dis-
 perse themselves; and if they should continue
 together an hour after such command to dis-
 perse, “ the offenders therein should be ad-
 “ judged felons, and should suffer death, as
 “ in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.”

Persons who did not disperse within an hour
 after proclamation made, might be appre-
 hended; and, if killed or maimed by reason
 of their resistance, the magistrates were to be
 indemnified; and those who, on such occa-
 sions, obstructed the magistrates in the execu-
 tion of their office, were to suffer death as
 felons.

Whether such laws as these ought ever
 to have been passed in any country, having
 the most distant pretensions to the character
 of a free country, the dullest of all human
 creatures may be able to decide. But such

was the national frenzy, that upwards of twenty thousand inhabitants of England were found mad enough to sign petitions in favour of these bills. One reason assigned, for passing the first of these laws, was, the preservation of the person of the sovereign. But ideas so different formerly prevailed in England, even under the reigns of the Stuarts, that it is observed, in one of the letters, written by Algernon Sydney, to Henry Savile, that it was a sentiment maintained in parliament, in the latter end of the reign of Charles the Second, that "kings governing justly, according to law, had no need of guards." Indeed, the best security for the person of a prince is the wisdom, the equity, and the benignity of his administration. And at the time when the two bills passed, which were brought in by Mr. Pitt and by lord Grenville, there were some Englishmen high-spirited enough to assert, that no treason, committed against the person of any prince, could be a crime of equal magnitude, and of equal malignity,

lignity, with treason against the liberties of a whole nation; and that those, who maintained the contrary, must be men unworthy even to breathe the air of a free country.

As individuals, who have been in a state of lunacy, are sometimes restored to their senses, so it also happens to nations. And, whenever the people of England return again to their senses, they will probably inform their ministers, or their representatives, that it is not conformable to their wishes, nor to their interests, that enormous subsidies should be paid to foreign princes, for rendering no services to this country; that it is not beneficial to them to be engaged in unnecessary wars; that they have a just right to expect to be more fully and more equally represented in parliament; and that no laws ought to be passed, or ought to exist, which deprive them of the freedom of speech, or the freedom of the press, or of the liberty of meeting to consider whether they are aggrieved.

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Amidst all the distresses of the present period, the inhabitants of Great Britain have, however, yet some consolations. They have the pleasure of reflecting, that they have enjoyed a great national credit; of which it is a sufficient evidence, that they are now more than four hundred millions in debt. They have likewise the advantage of a great variety, and great plenty, of new and ingenious taxes; the prices of all kinds of provisions are at such a rate, that the poorer, and even the middle classes of the community, are very sufficiently secured from luxury; and the people have also the singular felicity of having William Pitt, the younger, chancellor of the exchequer, and first minister of this country.

that they have a just right to expect to be more fully and more equally represented in parliament; and that no law ought to be passed, or ought to exist, which deprive them of the freedom of the press, or of the freedom of meeting to consider whether they are aggrieved.

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